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SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND CHURCH INVOLVEMENT: THE CHURCH-SECT DISTINCTION APPLIED TO INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION

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What are the implications of a person's "social status" for his religious behavior? This is the broad question to which this paper is directed. The question is in no sense novel, but the fact that the results of past research are often contradictory gives the issue continuing vitality. While some studies have found that "religion" increases with rising status and that it is greatest among the higher-status groups, others have described the reverse association.

In attempting to resolve this paradox, we shall consider one basic analytic distinction. Briefly put, this is the distinction between kind and degree—in this case, between the kind of religiosity possessed by an individual and the degree to which he expresses the kind of religiosity he has. More substantively, the distinction revolves about the question: *"In what way* does the individual express his religion?" and *"To what extent* does he express it?" To make this distinction is to raise the possibility that social status may influence not only the degree to which religiosity is expressed but also the forms religious expression takes in different strata of the population. If this is the case, then it would seem that the over-all influence of stratification can only be assessed by investigating distinctions in kind and degree conjointly.

In what follows, this theme is explored in two ways. First, we shall examine the contradictions in the literature in more detail. We shall also try to explain the contradictions by means of a theoretical framework which posits a crucial difference in the way that religion tends to be expressed among high- and among low-status groups. This framework reflects the traditional church-sect distinction except that, in this paper, the distinction is applied to modes of individual religious expression rather than to types of religious organization. It will be suggested that there is a "churchlike" mode of religious expression and a "sectlike" mode of religious expression, the former being characteristic of high-status groups, the latter of low-status groups.

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Secondly, we shall use this theoretical framework to test empirically the hypothesis that the relation between "religion" and status varies with the form of religious expression being subjected to investigation. Here we have recourse to data collected by the National Lutheran Council. These consist of questionnaire responses from 2,720 Lutherans in large-city congregations throughout the country. Originally collected in 1956 in order to examine the role of the church in the process of urban change, these data are particularly rich in measures of status and include several important indicators of behavioral involvement in the church.

Previous Research on Status and Religion

It is perhaps not surprising to find that the most prominent measures of religiosity used in the past have been those most readily available—church membership, attendance at Sunday worship services, and participation in parish organizations. On the basis of these particular indicators, past studies converge toward confirming the conclusion that low religiosity is related to low social status.

The studies of Cantril ("Educational and Economic Composition of Religious Groups," *American Journal of Sociology,* March 1943), Warner and Lunt (*The Social System of a Modern Community,* see especially Chapter XVI), and Burchinal ("Some Social Status Criteria and Church Membership and Church Attendance," *Journal of Social Psychology,* February 1959) all show that rates of church membership increase with rising social status, though Cantril, and Warner and Lunt note a slight asymmetrical drop-off in the case of the extreme upper class. Studies of church attendance—for example, a 1955 nation-wide survey, by the American Institute of Public Opinion, and the recent work of Glock and Ringer (*Society, the Church, and Its Parishioners*)—describe an association with status which is generally the same as that for church membership, including a decline among the upper class. Although an earlier national poll (*Catholic Digest,* 1951) and the work of Hollingshead (*Elmtown's Youth*) and Burchinal fail to find a drop-off in attendance among the upper class, these studies corroborate the larger finding that attendance generally increases with increasing status and that it is lowest among the lower classes. Finally, Kaufman ("Prestige Classes in a New York Rural Community," *Cornell University Agricultural Experimental Station Bulletin,* March 1944), Hollingshead, and Glock and Ringer obtain this same broad result for organizational participation as well, although here only the latter study finds a decline in activity among the upper class.

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The conclusion to be drawn from these findings is that, with the possible exception of the highest status groups, religiosity increases with social status and is lowest among the lower classes when church membership, church attendance, and organizational participation in church activities are used as indicators of religiosity. When other indicators of religiosity are used, however, the findings point to an opposite conclusion.

In addition to examining church attendance and organizational participation, Glock and Ringer also examined the respondent's degree of interest in scripture and religious literature generally. Here the association between religiosity and social status was reversed. Religious involvement as measured by interest in religious literature increased as status decreased and was greatest among the lower classes. A congruent result emerged from a study, by the author, of religious beliefs and attitudes in Winchester, Massachusetts (*An Empirical Investigation of Religious Participation, Attitudes, and Beliefs*). In this study, both the respondent's own status and that of his parents were used as variables. In each case, it was found that with decreasing status there was increased faith in the traditional elements of Christian doctrine together with increased reluctance to cross denominational lines either by changing church membership or by shifting doctrinal allegiance. A third study dealt with yet another indicator of religious involvement which is nevertheless similar to the indicators used by Glock and Ringer, and by the present author. Lenski found that, insofar as any relationship emerged, "religious interest" or general religious concern was also inversely related to social status ("Social Correlates of Religious Interests," *American Sociological Review,* October 1953).

Judging from this previous research, it seems impossible to make an unequivocal assessment of the relation between status and religion. But, returning to the notion of distinctions in kind, one possible solution may be that the relationship found between religion and status is a function of the indicator of religiosity which is used. We have seen that, on the one hand, the middle and upper classes seem to have the greater propensity for church membership, attendance, and organizational activity. On the other hand, the lower classes have a greater affinity for a more doctrinal sort of expression, are more religiously concerned, and have an allegiance to the church over and above their organizational participation in it. This polarity can be put more succinctly. While higher-status church involvement is characterized more by "doing," lower-class involvement is characterized more by "feeling" and appears to be less bound by institutional behavioral prescriptions.

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Labeling the "doing" orientation "churchlike" and the "feeling" orientation "sectlike" is in line with the traditional church-sect distinction originally formulated by Troeltsch (*The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*). It also differs from it. The distinction between church and sect was originally put forward primarily as a distinction between types of religious organization. However, the evidence indicates that, even within regular church denominations, it is possible to distinguish churchlike and sectlike parishioners and to do so largely on the basis of social class.

The church as an organization distinct from the sect is traditionally characterized by religious formalism, ritualism, and impersonality. Our churchlike parishioners share these attributes. Conversely, the sect is characterized by devotion to doctrine, a propensity to spontaneous religious expression, and a sense of being a distinct moral community. The sectlike parishioners tend to share these attributes and to do so regardless of denominational affiliation.

The distinction between the church and the churchlike, and the sect and sectlike, seems to arise largely out of the differing secular needs of different social strata in our population. Because of its emphatic rejection of those secular values which separate the "achievers" from the "non-achievers"—the "successful" from the "unsuccessful"—the sect has historically been a haven for the socially depressed and the socially isolated. The sect provides a community in which all are equally the children of God. Thus, the secular circumstances of the lower classes tend to propel them into sects. These same secular circumstances also serve to make the lower social strata in our society more sectlike in their orientation regardless of their formal religious affiliation.

If the distinction between the sectlike and the churchlike is in the nature of a hypothesis, there has already been a first test of its merits. Using a scale of churchlike and sectlike religious preferences to describe members of the same denomination, Dynes was able to sort his respondents into those who were more churchlike and those who were more sectarian in their orientation ("Church-Sect Typology and Socio-Economic Status," *American Sociological Review,* October 1955). Those who were churchlike tended to be of high status, those with sectarian predispositions tended to be lower class. These status differences obtained, as we have indicated, among members of the same denominations, in this case, the Presbyterians and the Methodists.

Judging from Dynes's findings, it appears that the distinction in kind between a churchlike and a sectlike orientation has a high degree of va-

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lidity at least with respect to religious predilections. Let us go on now to examine it further in terms of actual styles of church participation.

Social Status and Modes of Church Participation

So far we have noted the importance of a distinction between indicators of churchlike religious expression and measures of a more sectlike orientation. We have in effect distinguished between a formal participation that is more characteristic of the churchlike and an emotional attachment to the church that is more characteristic of the sectlike. The churchlike go to church more often and do more in it, but the sectlike exhibit more denominational loyalty, more concern for particular doctrinal tenets, and more interest in matters with specifically religious and nonsecular content.

At first glance it would appear that the phenomenon of church participation is, by definition, churchlike. This is true, of course, insofar as an emphasis on this dimension of religious experience is certainly more churchlike than a concern with other facets of religiosity such as adherence to traditional doctrine. However, it is possible to distinguish at a more refined level of analysis between sectlike and churchlike participation in the church.

It was possible with the Lutheran data to distinguish among three forms of church participation. These three forms of participation were treated as ways in which "involvement" in the church and its congregation could be expressed. The first of these, ritual observance, refers to the number of times the individual attended Sunday services in the past month. Those attending without fail were deemed "involved" on the dimension of ritual observance. The second, organizational participation, considers the number of formal church organizations to which the individual belongs. Here, those who belonged to at least one were characterized as organizationally involved. The third indicator, communal attachment, has to do with how many of the respondent's five closest friends were members of his congregation. A majority of three or more was taken as indicating involvement on this dimension. Table 1 shows the relationship of these different kinds of involvement to one another. The results tell us that ritual observance and communal attachment are clearly the most disparate pair: their measure of association is .31. On the other hand, ritual observance and organizational participation appear to be most nearly alike judging from their association of .65. In view of this relatively high association, we have omitted organizational participation in the following analysis in order to focus on its counterpart of ritual observance in comparison with communality.

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TABLE 1

H-ORDER ASSOCIATIONS AMONG THREE INDICATORS OF CHURCH INVOLVEMENT

	Organizational participation	Communal attachment
Ritual observance	.65	.31
Communal attachment	.43	. . .

Earlier we noted that ritual observance or church attendance may be considered to be an indicator of a churchlike relation to the church. We also observed from past research that the middle and upper classes were more prone to such participation than the lower classes. But what of communal attachment? We have touched upon this implicitly in reviewing the characteristics of the sect. Among other things, we characterized the sect as a moral community set apart from the secular world. We are now suggesting that close personal bonds within the church are a manifestation of this sectlike quality of high internal integration coupled with relative alienation from the larger society. Doing so receives corroboration from Dynes, whose research shows that in fact those with sectarian predispositions do tend to have more of their close friends in the parish ("The Consequences of Sectarianism for Social Participation," *Social Forces,* May 1957). Furthermore, both Goldschmidt ("Class Denominationalism in Rural California Churches," *American Journal of Sociology,* January 1944) and Holt ("Holiness Religion: Cultural Shock and Social Reorganization," *American Sociological Review,* October 1940) have commented on the greater emphasis on this aspect of the church experience in sectlike religious organizations.

In this light we can see a theoretical justification for the relatively low empirical relationship (.31) between our ritual and communal indicators as shown in Table 1. Futhermore, this same reasoning suggests that these two measures will be related to social status in different ways. Thus, the former, being more churchlike, should increase with increasing status (with the possible exception of the upper class) while the latter, being more sectlike, should generally show a decline with increasing status.

To test this hypothesis, we computed the percentage of respondents at each of four status levels who are ritually observant and the proportion who are communally attached to the church. Our index of status combines education, family income, and occupational prestige. The results are reported in Table 2. Considering the ritual measure first, we observe little difference in the ritual observance of the working and lower classes. The middle class

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exhibits the greatest amount of ritual observance. The upper class scores lower than the middle class but higher than either the working or lower class. These results correspond to the results of previous research. Turning to communal attachment, however, the association is reversed. With decreasing status, communality increases from a low of 20 per cent for the upper class to a high of 48 per cent for the lower class.

TABLE 2

RITUAL OBSERVANCE AND COMMUNAL ATTACHMENT OF DIFFERENT SOCIAL CLASSES OF PARISHIONERS*

	Social class			
	Upper	Middle	Working	Lower
Ritually observant, per cent	60	64	57	58
Communally attached, per cent	20	27	34	48
n =	230	470	765	382

*Note that the percentages do not add up to one hundred since a person may be both ritually and communally involved. In addition, the total number of respondents here, 1,847, is short of the sample number of 2,728 because of failure to respond to one of several items.

Our expectations, then, are generally confirmed. The middle and upper classes are found to be more churchlike in their involvement, while the working and lower classes are more sectlike in their involvement. This holds even though our data refer only to Lutherans and not members of a sect.

Table 2 considers ritual observance and communal attachment independently of one another and obscures the fact that many parishioners scored high or low on *both* of these indicators of involvement. Our hypothesis would also suggest that, if we single out those parishioners who are *only* ritually observant or *only* communally attached, we should find a relatively greater proportion of the latter among the lower and working classes than among the middle and upper classes. Table 3 shows the ratio, for each class, of the number of persons who were involved only communally to those who were involved only ritually.

There is no difference in the ratios of upper- and middle-class Lutherans. However, the ratio increases for the working class to .29 and reaches a peak

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of .55 for the lower class. This corroborates our central thesis that different social classes tend to give expression to their religion in different ways.

TABLE 3

RATIO OF THOSE WHO ARE SOLELY COMMUNALLY ATTACHED TO THOSE WHO ARE SOLELY RITUALLY INVOLVED FOR EACH SOCIAL CLASS*

	Social class			
	Upper	Middle	Working	Lower
Ratio of "pure" communal to "pure" ritual involvement types	.15	.13	.29	.55

*The higher the ratio in this table, the greater is the incidence of those who are solely communally dependent.

Another aspect of this thesis, however, has not as yet been explored. Although we have seen that lower-class participation is more sectlike while upper class is more churchlike, we have not shown that the lower-status adherents tend to be relatively more rewarded by their religion, as was suggested by our original formulation.

Differences in the rewards of religion are revealed by the responses to another question asked of respondents which we believe taps the distinction between churchlike and sectlike forms of religious expression from a different perspective. In this question, respondents were asked: "How much help is the church to you in the following areas of your life?" The choices ranged from "helping me to know of God's care and love for me" to "helping me to meet friends." Table 4 presents the results; the percentages represent the proportion answering "much help" to four or more of seven choices.

TABLE 4

STATUS AND DEGREE OF HELP DERIVED FROM CHURCH EXPERIENCE

	Social class			
	Upper	Middle	Working	Lower
Per cent "much help"	42	43	49	54
n =	226	462	742	317

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The results, once again, confirm our expectations. With declining status, there is an increasing propensity to experience a material or pyschological reward from one's contact with the church.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both our review of previous research and our own empirical findings suggest that status is differently related to religious involvement depending upon what kind of indicator of involvement is used. Earlier research suggests that, in general, the lower classes are more prone to "feel" their religion while the higher-status groups are more prone to a "doing" form of religiosity. Put another way, the higher-status groups are more apt to participate formally in church activities, while the lower-status group tends to be more emotionally involved or more concerned with matters of doctrine.

Our own findings indicate that, even where only the "doing" facet of the church experience is considered, one can still distinguish between church and sect types of participation. Compared with middle and upper-class propensities to engage in the more impersonal forms of ritual and organizational activity, the lower classes tend to be more personally involved in the church as a community. In addition, the lower-status groups appear to be more rewarded by religion in their everyday life.

THE MAJOR DIMENSIONS OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Yoshio Fukuyama

Congregational Christian Churches

Sociological descriptions of the contemporary religious situation in the United States present a somewhat ambiguous picture. On the one hand are those who argue that America is experiencing a "revival" of religious interest unparalleled in its history. On the other hand, we are told that religion in America is characterized more by its decline than by its "upswing," that America is more secular and emptied of religious interest today than ever before. A third group argues that religion in our society is best described by its stability rather than by change, that the dominant themes and influences of religion are no different today than they were a century ago.

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